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SUBJECT: SECRETARY BURNS MEETS FM BOGOLLAGAMA

Classified By: SCA Assistant Secretary Blake

¶1. (SBU) Participants:

U.S.
Under Secretary Bill Burns
Assistant Secretary Robert Blake
Special Assistant Matthew Lowe
Elena Soderblom (Notetaker)

SRI LANKA
Foreign Minister Bogollagama
Notetaker

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: On September 25, Under Secretary Burns told Foreign Minister Bogollagama that the U.S. wanted to improve relations with Sri Lanka but sought progress on freedom of movement for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the resettlement and rehabilitation process. He also called for greater media freedom, questioning the justice of journalist Tissainayagam's conviction. The Foreign Minister asked for a benchmark number for resettlement that would satisfy the U.S. He also expressed concern that the War Crimes Report that the State Department would release in late October could slow the reconciliation process. END SUMMARY.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR IDPS

¶3. (C) Under Secretary Burns noted that Sri Lanka had an opportunity for political reconciliation after a long struggle. He pressed the Foreign Minister to register and allow IDPs freedom of movement.

¶4. (C) The Foreign Minister acknowledged that the first step toward national reconciliation was resettling those living in the camps. The government had issued identification cards to 160,000 IDPs. He reported that 40,000 IDPs could go to Jaffna, now cleared of mines, but the area lacked shelter. He maintained that the government wanted to avoid using tents and instead constructed permanent shelter for the returnees. India has given corrugated sheets, but only enough for 5,000 people. Sri Lanka needs further help with materials for permanent housing, safe water systems, and the beginnings of income-generating solutions. He noted that 6,000-7,000 IDPs have resettled in the eastern province, but of those the government also found 140 LTTE cadres, of whom 40 came from the suicide force. "We will strengthen the police further to combat the possibility of infiltration," he said.

¶5. (C) He underlined that "it serves no political purpose" to keep the IDPs in camps. But in order to move the IDPs, the GSL needed the mines cleared. The USG provided \$6 million to four NGOs for demining, but Bogollagama claimed that they had done little. India had provided 200 mine clearers who have contributed to the total clearance of 25,000 mines cleared, but the GSL still required ten demining machines to complete the job on time. Assistant Secretary Blake stressed that further U.S. assistance depended on the GSL allowing freedom of movement, which they could

demonstrate by removing the barbed wire from the camps and allowing the IDPs unimpeded exit and re-entry. Bogollagama replied that barbed wire surrounds many houses including his own.

¶6. (C) Bogollagama questioned where the IDPs would go if the camps opened up. He reported that 40,000 children in the camps attend school and 382 sat for the high-level exams. He noted that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has done a "good job." Blake reminded him that the U.S. supported the IOM's program in Sri Lanka.

¶7. (C) Blake underlined that the GSL faced a credibility problem after too many broken pledges and missed deadlines. Bogollagama asked what benchmark the U.S. expected the GSL to meet in order to provide more assistance, and offered "not 10,000 but 50,000 resettled." Blake suggested that the GSL start by allowing freedom of movement for at least all those who have been registered. Bogollagama insisted that the government has "done a lot," and the U.S. had to understand the "process." Burns responded, "We need to see more from your side for us to do more."

MEDIA FREEDOM

¶8. (C) Burns expressed concern at the conviction of journalist Tissainayagam, and the state of media freedom in Sri Lanka. Bogollagama claimed the sentence, currently in the appellate process, was not excessive, and touted the fairness of Sri Lanka's judicial system. He maintained that journalists enjoy press freedom.

WAR CRIMES REPORT

¶9. (C) Bogollagama raised the War Crimes Report, and asked to see it before its release. Burns pledged to be transparent but did not offer to share a draft. Bogollagama believed that the report reflected that the U.S. now thought of the GSL as the enemy. "What have we done that gets you to look at us differently?" he asked. He noted that Tamil groups in the U.S. had direct linkages with the LTTE. Burns explained that the report was mandated by Congress. Blake reiterated that the report would describe crimes committed by both sides, and make clear that the U.S. had not had access to the regions of the fighting during the period covered by the report. He suggested that the GSL preempt the report by developing its own system of accountability. Bogollagama warned that the report might dampen the healing process.

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